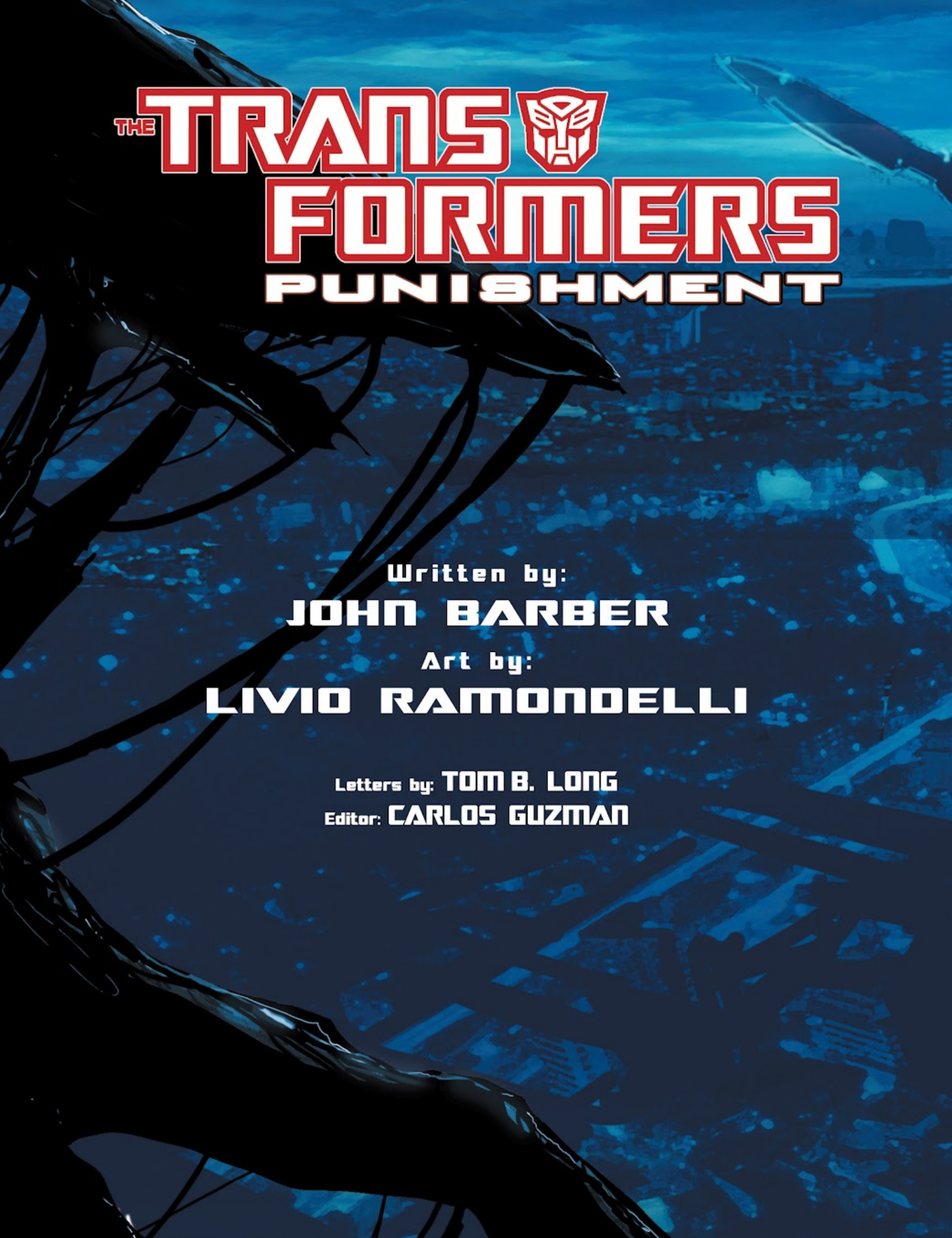
IDW
THE TRANSFORMERS
JOHN BARBER
LIVIO RAMONDELLI
PUNISHMENT



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OPTIMUS PRIME
Autobot hero
STARSCREAM
Cybertron's leader
WINDBLADE
Autobot newcomer
SLUG
Dinobot leader

CYBERTRON,
AFTER THE WAR.
PRESENT DAY.
C'MON. WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?
CITY OF STEEL

THAT'S IT. I'M OUT.
WHAT?
THAT'S THE KISS OF DEATH! WHO WOULD EVEN SAY THAT?
I DON'T GET IT.
YOU DON'T SAY NOTHING'S GOING TO GO WRONG, TREADSHOT.
IT'S THE KISS OF DEATH.

EXACTLY. THAT'S LITERALLY EXACTLY WHAT I SAID.
THIS WHOLE THING IS A BAD IDEA. WE SHOULD GO STRAIGHT.
I KNOW A GUY WHO KNOWS A GUY AT THE SPACEPORT, AND HE CAN GET US JOBS.

NONSENSE. AUTOBOTS CAN GET JOBS, NEUTRALS CAN GET JOBS— NOBODY'S HIRING DECEPTICONS.
THEY MIGHT SAY THE WAR'S OVER AND IT'S TIME TO MOVE ON, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING TO THE LOSERS.

WE DIDN'T LOSE.
WE, LIKE, WE BROKE EVEN.
WE HAVE STARSCREAM IN CHARGE.

STARSCREAM IS A SELL-OUT AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHY I'M SAYING WE NEED TO ROB HIM!
WE CAN TRADE THE JUNK HE'S BEEN HOARDING AND GET A SHIP OFF-WORLD.
TRY OUR LUCK ON SOME OUTER-RIM PLANET.
BRISKO HERE'S GOT A MAP, I GOT THE—
CLAK

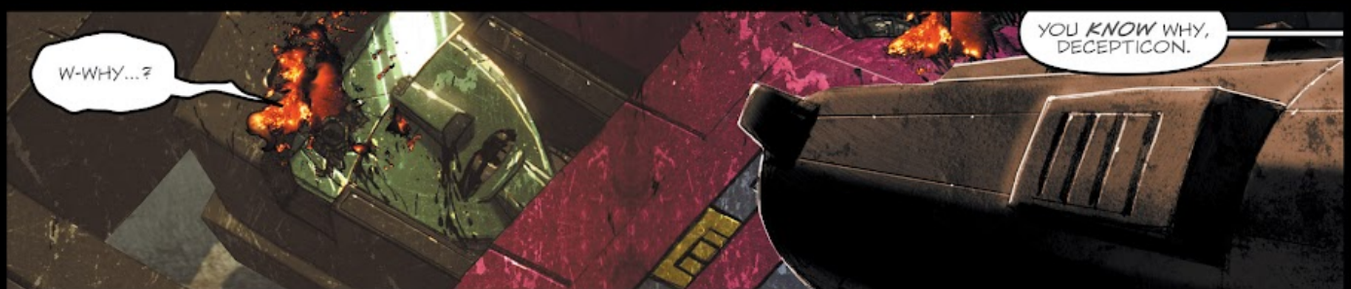
YOU HEAR THAT?
IT... I'M SURE IT'S NOTHI—
DON'T SAY IT, TREADSHOT.

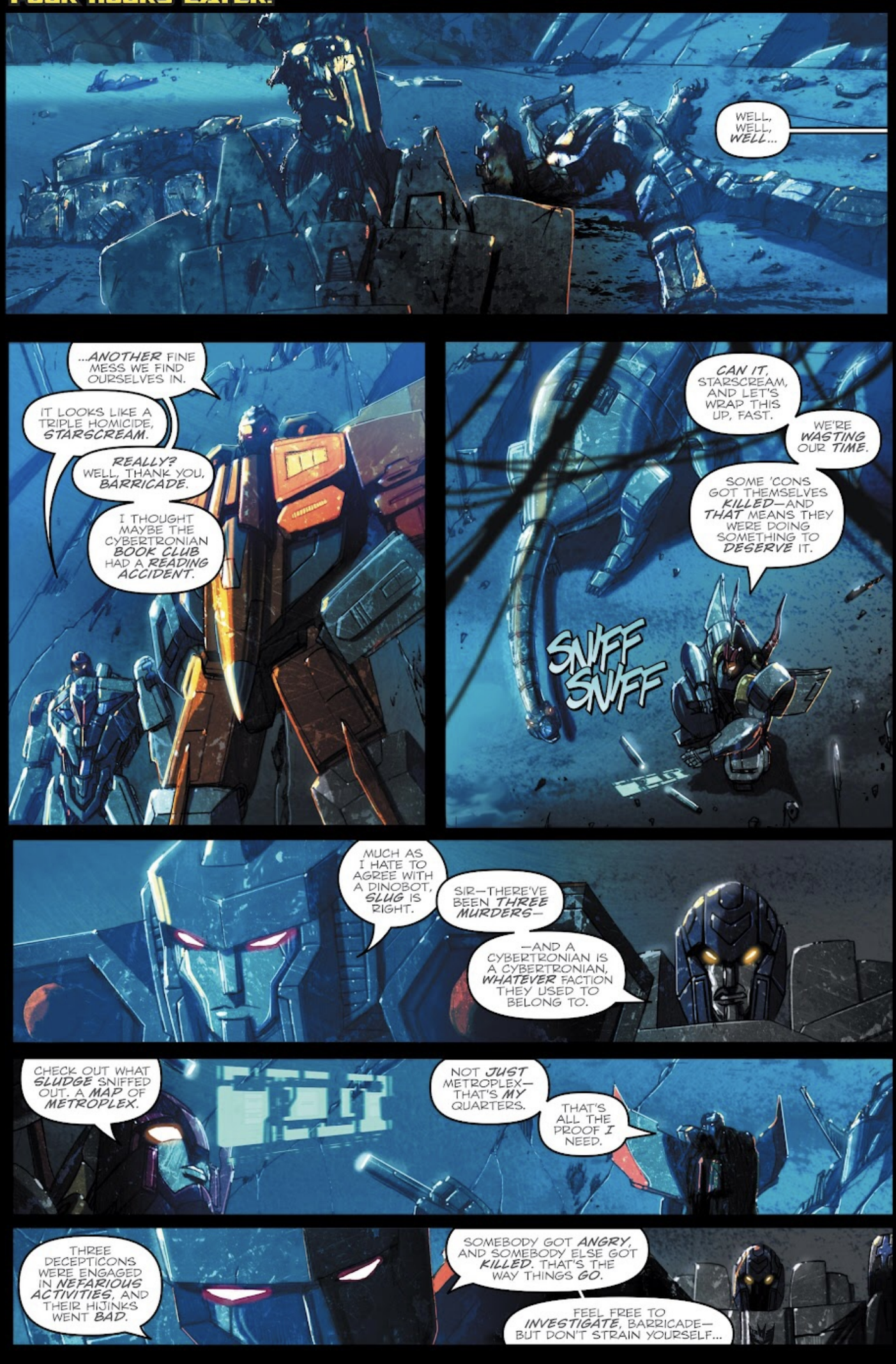
CHRAKK
SAY WHATEVER YOU WANT—IT WON'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE.
CHRAKK

HEY, DON'T—
KRRCH!

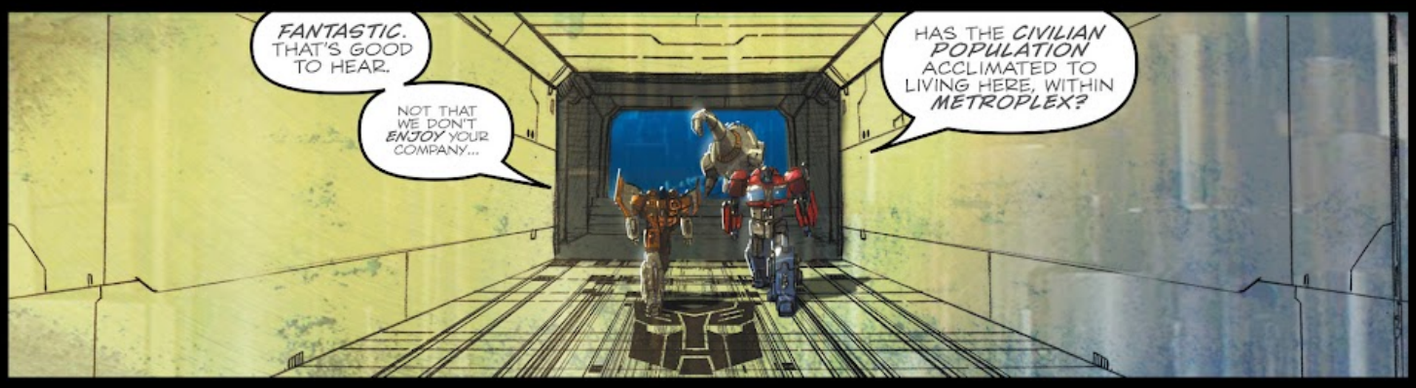
WILDER, RUN—GET—
AGH!
BRISKO!
CHAK CHAK

UNNNHH...
...HURTS... BURNS...
...BRISKO... YOU... OKAY, BUDDY...?
HE'S NOT OKAY.

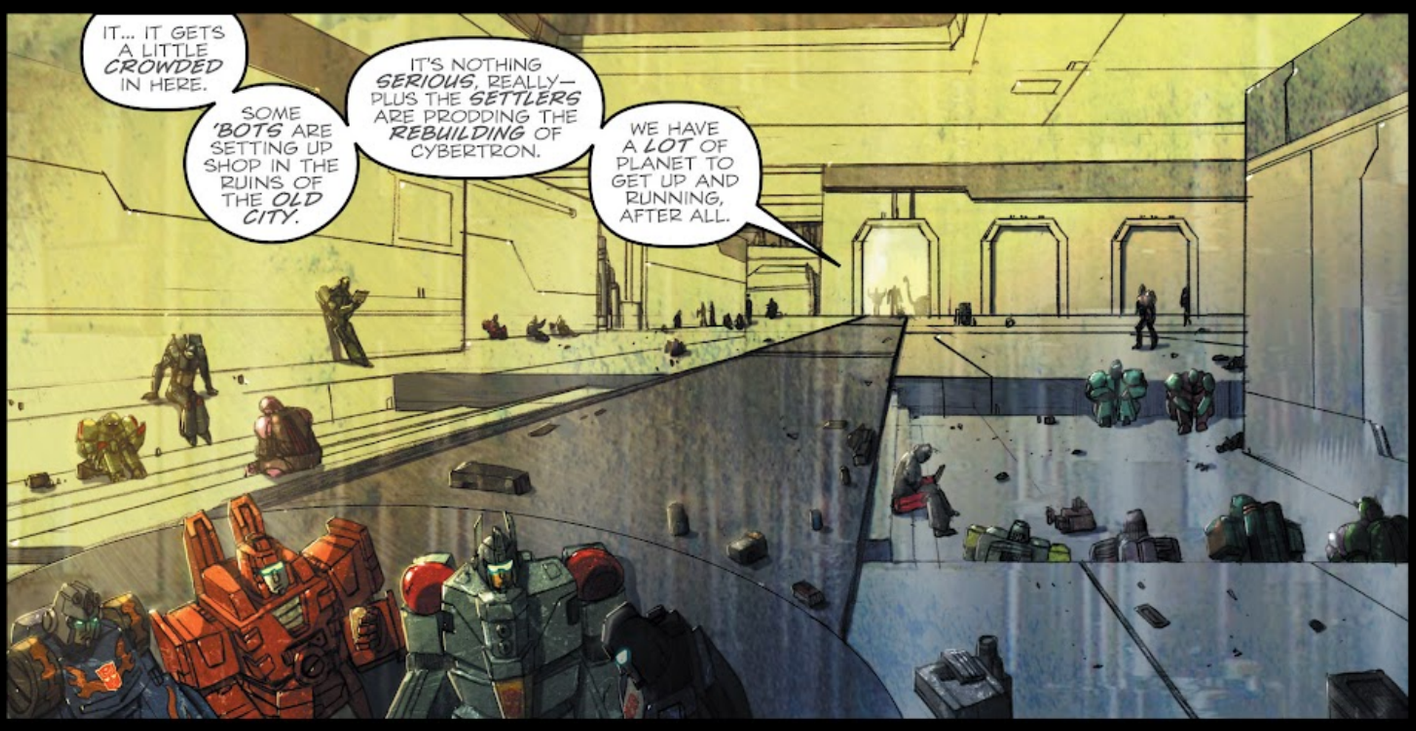

W-WHY...?
YOU KNOW WHY, DECEPTICON.


FOUR HOURS LATER.
WELL, WELL, WELL...
...ANOTHER FINE MESS WE FIND OURSELVES IN.
IT LOOKS LIKE A TRIPLE HOMICIDE, STARSCREAM.
REALLY? WELL, THANK YOU, BARRICADE.
I THOUGHT MAYBE THE CYBERTRONIAN BOOK CLUB HAD A READING ACCIDENT.
CAN IT, STARSCREAM, AND LET'S WRAP THIS UP, FAST.
WE'RE WASTING OUR TIME.
SOME 'CONS GOT THEMSELVES KILLED—AND THAT MEANS THEY WERE DOING SOMETHING TO DESERVE IT.
SNIFF SNIFF
MUCH AS I HATE TO AGREE WITH A DINOBOT, SLUG IS RIGHT.
SIR—THERE'VE BEEN THREE MURDERS—
—AND A CYBERTRONIAN IS A CYBERTRONIAN, WHATEVER FACTION THEY USED TO BELONG TO.
CHECK OUT WHAT SLUDGE SNIFFED OUT. A MAP OF METROPLEX.
NOT JUST METROPLEX—THAT'S MY QUARTERS.
THAT'S ALL THE PROOF I NEED.
THREE DECEPTICONS WERE ENGAGED IN NEFARIOUS ACTIVITIES, AND THEIR HIJINKS WENT BAD.
SOMEBODY GOT ANGRY, AND SOMEBODY ELSE GOT KILLED. THAT'S THE WAY THINGS GO.
FEEL FREE TO INVESTIGATE, BARRICADE—BUT DON'T STRAIN YOURSELF...

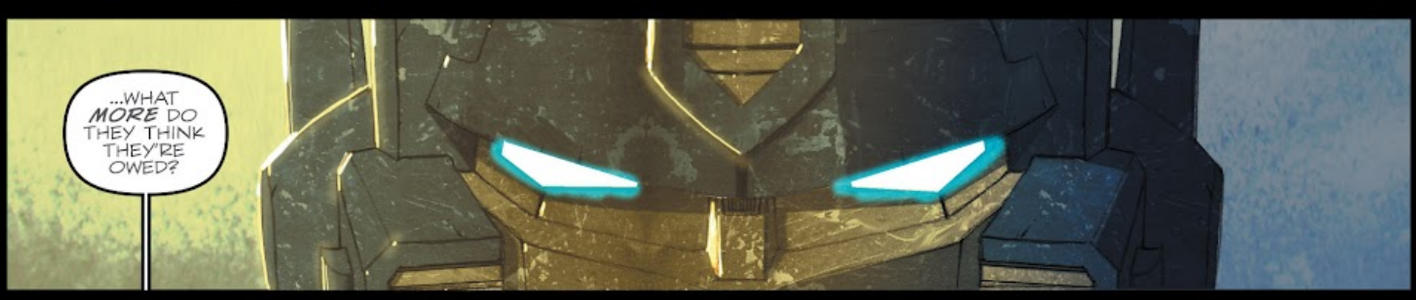
"...WE'VE GOT OTHER THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT."
MY WORLD. CYBERTRON. A CHROME SPHERE...
...TARNISHED BY MILLIONS OF YEARS OF WAR.
HERE HE COMES—DON'T EMBARRASS ME.
I AM OPTIMUS PRIME, AND I HELPED WIN THAT WAR.
BUT NOW, WITH STARSCREAM CHOSEN AS LEADER...
...MY NEW GOAL IS TO WIN THE PEACE.
GREETINGS... OLD FRIENDS.
STARSCREAM—YOU LOOK... THE SAME.
RIGHT BACK ATCHA, BIG GUY.
WINDBLADE—
—GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
I TRUST YOU AND THE DINOBOTS HAVE BEEN KEEPING YOUR EYES ON THINGS?
SNORT.
YOU KNOW HOW THINGS GET. WE'VE BEEN BUSY, BUT...
WINDBLADE AND I ARE GETTING ALONG FAMOUSLY.
HRPH. I GUESS THAT'S PRETTY MUCH TRUE.
SO, AH, TO WHAT DO WE OWE THIS VISIT?
I THOUGHT YOU AND YOUR LITTLE PALS WERE HANGING AROUND... WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE PLACE?
EARTH. YOU KNOW THAT, STARSCREAM—LET'S NOT PLAY GAMES.
I'M HERE FOR A PERSONAL REASON, AND ONLY TEMPORARILY.


FANTASTIC. THAT'S GOOD TO HEAR.
NOT THAT WE DON'T ENJOY YOUR COMPANY...
HAS THE CIVILIAN POPULATION ACCLIMATED TO LIVING HERE, WITHIN METROPLEX?

YEAH, INSIDE METROPLEX IS COOL. IT'S THE OUTSKIRTS WHERE—
DON'T BOTHER HIM WITH DETAILS, DINOBOT.
WELL, I THINK MURDERS ARE IMPORTANT.
MURDERS, STARSCREAM?
AND WHAT DOES HE MEAN, "THE OUTSKIRTS"?


IT... IT GETS A LITTLE CROWDED IN HERE.
SOME 'BOTS ARE SETTING UP SHOP IN THE RUINS OF THE OLD CITY.
IT'S NOTHING SERIOUS, REALLY—PLUS THE SETTLERS ARE PRODDING THE REBUILDING OF CYBERTRON.
WE HAVE A LOT OF PLANET TO GET UP AND RUNNING, AFTER ALL.

IT'S A GHETTO OUT THERE, PRIME. A DECEPTICON GHETTO.
THE 'CONS CAN'T FIND JOBS HERE—AND THEY DON'T HAVE ANYWHERE ELSE TO GO.
THEY CAN'T FIND JOBS BECAUSE THEY'RE KILLERS AND LOW-LIFES. THAT'S THE "MURDER," PRIME.
SOME DECEPTICONS SQUABBLING OVER WHO'S GONNA STEAL WHAT.
AND AFTER ALL THEY DID TO CYBERTRON...


...WHAT MORE DO THEY THINK THEY'RE OWED?

NONE OF US IS OWED ANYTHING.
FOUR MILLION YEARS OF WAR PROVED THAT.
AUTOBOTS AND DECEPTICONS BATTLED FOR EONS... DESTROYING OUR WORLD IN THE PROCESS.
IF CYBERTRON IS TO LIVE, WE MUST MOVE FORWARD. BUT SLUG'S WORDS BURN ME TO MY SPARK.
HOW MANY OF THESE DECEPTICONS—THESE CYBERTRONIANS—ARE MERELY VICTIMS OF A CHARISMATIC LEADER'S RHETORIC...
...AND HOW MANY ARE—AS SLUG BELIEVES—BRUTAL KILLERS WAITING FOR A CHANCE TO STRIKE?
I SEE THE GLANCES, THE ANGRY EYES.
I LED THE AUTOBOTS.
NOT WITHOUT REASON, THE DECEPTICONS BLAME ME FOR THEIR FATE.
THEY LIVE IN THE HOUSE THAT PRIME BUILT.
HEY, AUTOBOT.
YOU MAKE A WRONG TURN?
THIS IS OUR PLACE.

SPARKSTALKER, DON'T PRESS HIM.
THAT'S THE PRIME!
I KNOW WHO THIS IS!
HE IS OUR ENEMY!
HE LOOKS AT US, AND HE SEES THE VANQUISHED.
HE STROLLS INTO OUR CITY LIKE WE ARE NOTHING.
HE BELIEVES WE ARE POWERLESS. WELL, THERE'S ONE OF HIM AND—
ENOUGH!
CYBERTRON BELONGS TO ALL.
YOU'RE WRONG, PRIME. THIS IS OUR CITY.
AND AFTER ALL YOUR KIND DID TO US—
—IT WILL NEVER BE ENOUGH!
SKWAAAAH
THIS ISN'T WHY I CAME HERE!
BUT THE DECEPTICON DOESN'T CARE WHY...

...HE—THEY—ONLY WANT VENGEANCE FOR WHAT WE HAVE DONE TO EACH OTHER.
PLEASE—I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU!
HA!
HOW NOBLE!
DECEPTICONS—TEAR HIM APART!
FOR A MOMENT I THINK THIS IS THE END.
BUT THINGS GET WORSE.
YOU JUST CAN'T REASON WITH THE RABBLE.
PRIMUS KNOWS I'VE TRIED...
...BUT HEY, I CAN'T BLAME YOU.
NOT WITH ALL WE HAVE IN COMMON. I MEAN...
AW, BOLTS.
...EVERYBODY HATES ME, TOO.
A HANDSHAKE WITH THE DEVIL... AND I LIVE ANOTHER DAY.
ANOTHER MINOR COMPROMISE, LIKE A THOUSAND BEFORE, AND EVERY HAND CLAWING AT STARSCREAM—
—CLAWING AT ME—
—GIVES PROOF THAT THIS IS OUR SHARED LEGACY. THIS IS THE LEGACY OF CYBERTRON...

...OF MY WORLD.
YOU'VE BEEN AROUND A WHILE—YOU'RE A GUY THAT MAKES THINGS HAPPEN.
WHY'D YOU NEVER PICK UP A FLYING MODE FOR YOURSELF, PRIME?
SEEMS LIKE IT'D COME IN HANDY—LIKE, YOU KNOW, WHEN EVERYBODY'S SHOOTING AT YOU.
IT'S NOT EVERYONE.
STARSCREAM—THE FORMER DECEPTICON WHO'S MANIPULATED THE POST-WAR WORLD FOR PERSONAL GLORY...
...FOR THE BRIEFEST OF MOMENTS—HE'S THE ONLY THING KEEPING ME ALIVE...
FIGHT OR FLEE

I KNOW SARCASM ISN'T EXACTLY YOUR FORTE, SO LET ME EXPLAIN WHAT I MEAN BY "EVERYBODY"...
YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF—
DOWN THERE. HE'S NOT EVEN LOOKING AT US.
THERE'S ALWAYS TIME TO PAY ATTENTION, STARSCREAM.
WHOEVER THAT IS, HE CLEARLY DOESN'T WANT TO BE SEEN WITH...
...WELL, WITH WHATEVER HE'S CARRYING.
AND PEOPLE THAT DON'T WANT TO BE NOTICED—
—USUALLY SHOULD BE.
THERE'S A REASON I DON'T HAVE A FLYING MODE, STARSCREAM.
I'VE ALWAYS FOUND IT BEST—
—TO STAY GROUNDED.
WHAT— WAIT— DON'T—
OH, WHATEVER.
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NORMAL PEOPLE AND A MOB IS SIMPLE.
YOU THERE!
KRUSH
SQUAAAK!
BOTH GAIN STRENGTH FROM THEIR NUMBERS...
STOP RUNNING!
TRUNCH
CRUNDH
...BUT A MOB RELIES ON FEAR.
ACT WITHOUT FEAR...

...AND ITS POWER DISSIPATES.
GUYS! GUYS!
OPTIMUS FREAKING PRIME IS AFTER ME!
HE SAW ME WITH THE—
—MERCHANDISE.
AW.
RANSACK?
STRATOTRONIC?
AW.
AW, NO.
AW, THIS WAS JUST SUPPOSED TO BE NOTHING—
—WHO'D KILL US FOR BOOTLEGGING?
I HAD TOLD MY ATTACKERS I DIDN'T WANT TO HURT THEM, AND THAT WAS TRUE.
BUT I WASN'T ABOUT TO VENTURE OUTSIDE THE CITY UNARMED.
BESIDES—
CHAAF
—I KNOW HOW TO SHOOT TO WOUND.
FREEZE.
AGH!
IT DIDN'T SEEM APPROPRIATE TO SAY TO STARSCREAM WHILE HE WAS SAVING ME...

...BUT ANOTHER THING WITH FLIERS IS THEY HAVE FARTHER TO FALL.
KRATSH
STILL... AT LEAST FLIERS DON'T HAVE TO CLIMB.
GREAT IDEA, PRIME.
"BEST TO STAY GROUNDED."
VERY, VERY CLEVER.
CHAGG CHAGG
GUNSHOTS. IF MY ARROGANCE HAS CAUSED INNOCENTS TO BE HARMED—
—IF MY WOUNDING SHOT LET THAT DECEPTICON TAKE A...
...A LIFE.
SORRY I'M LATE. I WAS CALMING THINGS DOWN.
ARE THOSE DEAD DECEPTICONS IN THE ALLEY YOURS?
NO, STARSCREAM...
...AND NEITHER IS THIS ONE.
THE 'CON I WAS CHASING—SHOT IN THE BRAIN AND SPARK. MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY.
STARSCREAM IDENTIFIES HIM AS HEAVY BARREL. JUST A LOW-LEVEL SOLDIER IN THE WAR...

...BUT A DECEPTICON, NONETHELESS.
WE DEMAND JUSTICE!
BACK! GET BEHIND THE LINE!
ANOTHER NOTCH ON YOUR BLASTER, PRIME?!
YOU ALL SERVE THE SYSTEM THAT LETS AUTOBOTS EXECUTE US WITH IMPUNITY!
OPTIMUS PRIME NEVER EXECUTED NOBODY, DECEPTICON—BUT DON'T PUSH YOUR LUCK WITH ME.
EASY, SLUG.
HEAVY BARREL AND HIS FRIENDS WERE USING YOUR RIGHTEOUS ANGER AS COVER FOR STEALING AN ENGEX DISTILLER: BUT NONE OF THEM DESERVED TO DIE.
YEAH, SPARKSTALKER— AND YOU'RE LUCKY PRIME DOESN'T PRESS CHARGES AGAINST YOU AND THE REST OF YOUR FIRECONS.
TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT!
YOU OKAY, BARRICADE? YOU LOOK ROUGH.
I CAN'T STAND THIS STUFF.
THE KILLING?
A DECEPTICON WARRANT OFFICER GETS USED TO KILLING, WINDBLADE. IT'S EVERYTHING ELSE.
I REALLY DOUBT PRIME KILLED THIS... WHOEVER THIS IS...
STRATOTRONIC. USED TO RUN WITH GUTCRUNCHER. I ARRESTED THEM ON A 4-01 DISORDERLY, ABOUT A MILLION YEARS AGO.
GUTCRUNCHER WON'T BE HAPPY TO HEAR THIS. STRATO HELPED HIM OPEN HIS BAR A COUPLE MONTHS BACK.
IS THAT RIGHT?
OPTIMUS—
—WE HAVE A LEAD.

THE BAR IS ONLY A FEW BLOCKS AWAY.
STRATOTRONIC AND HEAVY BARREL WERE RUNNING AN ENGEX BOOTLEGGING OPERATION. THE CONNECTION IS CLEAR.
WHAT WE NEED NEXT IS MOTIVE.
WINDBLADE COMES ALONG TO LEARN ABOUT CYBERTRONIAN MOTIVATIONS— AND TO KEEP ME OUT OF TROUBLE.
I TAKE YOU TO THE NICEST PLACES, PRIME.
YOU—
—YOUR KIND ISN'T WANTED HERE.
AND WHAT KIND WOULD THAT BE?
GIMME A BREAK. I MEAN AUTOBOTS.
WELL, I'M NOT AN AUTOBOT. AT LEAST I WASN'T A PART OF YOUR WAR.
YOU WEAR THE SIGIL. AND ANYWAY...
...YOUR BUDDY IS AUTOBOT ENOUGH FOR THE BOTH OF YOU.
YOU SHOULD BE HONORED TO HAVE HIM IN YOUR BAR, GUTCRUNCHER.
THIS IS THE TRUE PRIME— THE 'BOT THAT TURNED MEGATRON GOOD.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT?
SANDSTORM. IT'S BEEN A WHILE, OLD—
DON'T "OLD FRIEND" ME, PRIME.

I JUST WONDER WHAT YOU'RE DOING *HERE*. BLURR HAS A DECENT ESTABLISHMENT...
SO, JUST A BAR ISN'T OKAY—I NEED TO BE AT AN *AUTOBOT*-RUN BAR?
MAYBE YOU SEE WHY I'M *DONE* WITH YOUR SCENE.
I SPENT ENOUGH TIME *BEHIND ENEMY LINES* TO SEE WHAT'S WHAT.
WE DIDN'T COME HERE TO DEBATE *HISTORY*.
GUTCRUNCHER—
I DON'T *CARE*, PRIME.
JUST LISTEN.
JUST LEAVE!
STRATOTRONIC IS *DEAD*.
GRANCH
AGH!
DAMMIT!
I *TOLD* HIM... I TOLD THAT *IDIOT*, STAY OUTTA TROUBLE.
WHAT DID YOU CATCH HIM *DOING*...? DID HE—DID HE TRY AN' *FIGHT* YOU?
I DIDN'T KILL HIM, GUTCRUNCHER.
I KNOW HE WAS BOOTLEGGING ENGEX FOR YOU, BUT I DON'T *CARE* ABOUT THAT.
HE ACTED SUSPICIOUSLY, SO I FOLLOWED.
AND SOMEONE *MURDERED* HIM AND HIS COMPATRIOTS.
LIKE THEY DID WITH *TREADSHOT* YESTERDAY...
...SOMEONE IS KILLING DECEPTICONS THAT *COMMIT CRIMES*.
AND YOU...

...YOU GOT YOURSELF A WHOLE MESS OF SUSPECTS.
UNFORTUNATELY, SANDSTORM—YOU MAY BE RIGHT.
BOTH OF YOU—LEAVE THIS TO US.
THESE ARE MURDERS, GUTCRUNCHER. WE'RE NOT ALLOWING VIGILANTE JUSTICE.
YEAH?
LIKE OPTIMUS PRIME IS GONNA ARREST AN AUTOBOT FOR KILLING DECEPTICONS.
OF COURSE HE WILL—IF SOMEBODY HELPS HIM!
THE RULE OF LAW APPLIES EQUALLY TO EVERY CYBERTRONIAN!
NO, IT DOESN'T... BUT IT SHOULD.
LOOK... I DON'T BELIEVE IN HIS WAR, OR HIS AUTOBOT CAUSE...
...BUT I DO KNOW PRIME IS HONEST.
IF DECEPTICONS WON'T AID HIM—WELL, MAYBE SOMEBODY THAT KNOWS THE DECEPTICONS CAN HELP.
YOU SAT THERE AND PRETENDED TO BE MY FRIEND, SANDSTORM, WHEN ALL YOU WERE DOING WAS WAITING FOR AN EXCUSE—
—AN EXCUSE TO JOIN HIS ARMY AGAIN.
I NEVER LIED TO YOU, GUTCRUNCHER—I'M NO AUTOBOT...
...BUT I HEAR PRIME'S AUTOBOT ENOUGH FOR THE BOTH OF US.
WHEN HE WAS A CADET, SANDSTORM WAS ALWAYS LOOKING FOR EXCITEMENT...

...I SUPPOSE THAT'S WHY HE JOINED THE ELITE COMBAT UNIT, THE WRECKERS.
AFTER GOING DEEP BEHIND ENEMY LINES HE RETURNED, HAUNTED. WHEN THE WAR ENDED, HE LEFT FOR THE OUTER RIM ON A QUEST FOR TRUTH.
BUT AS HE JOINS WINDBLADE AND ME AT THE SITE OF YESTERDAY'S FIRST TRIPLE HOMICIDE, I KEEP ASKING MYSELF...
...DID THE 'BOT I ONCE CALLED FRIEND REALLY COME BACK?
YOU'VE CHANGED, SANDSTORM.
YOUR LEGENDARY POWERS OF OBSERVATION AT WORK.
THE WAR CHANGED EVERYBODY, PRIME.
IT'S MORE THAN THAT. I HOPE THIS INVESTIGATION GRANTS YOU THE PURPOSE YOU'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR.
YOU ARE... ONE OF A KIND, PRIME.
KINDA LIKE THIS SHELL, RECOGNIZE IT?
I'M AFRAID NOT.
NO REASON YOU WOULD. PROBABLY WHY STARSCREAM'S INVESTIGATORS LEFT IT.
BUT I THINK YOU'LL LIKE THIS STORY...
SORRY TO INTERRUPT, GUYS—
—BUT SOMETHING'S HAPPENING BACK AT GUTCRUNCHER'S BAR.
WHAT KIND OF SOMETHING, WINDBLADE?
UH...
...SOMETHING REAL BAD.

WINDBLADE DIDN'T EXAGGERATE.
SANDSTORM AND I FOLLOWED HER, AS FAST AS WE COULD...
NO.
NO.
...KNOWING BEFORE WE STARTED THAT WE WERE FAR, FAR TOO LATE.
THERE WERE NO SURVIVORS.
QUEST FOR FIRE

THEY'RE DEAD.
EVERY FRIEND I HAVE ON THIS MISERABLE PLANET—
—BECAUSE I HELPED YOU, PRIME!
OR BECAUSE SOMEONE IS FOLLOWING THE ENGEX BOOTLEGGING TO GUTCRUNCHER'S ENGEX SALES.
GUTCRUNCHER SEEMED AWARE SOMETHING WAS HAPPENING.
IF WE CAN FIND A LINK BETWEEN HIM AND TREADSHOT'S MURDER YESTERDAY—
OPTIMUS... THE GUY JUST SUFFERED A SERIOUS LOSS.
THIS MIGHT NOT BE THE RIGHT TIME FOR STRATEGIZING.
NO, NO, WINDBLADE. PRIME'S RIGHT.
AS USUAL.
SORRY I SNAPPED. GUTCRUNCHER WAS ALREADY IN THE LINE OF FIRE. YOUR—OUR ONLY MISTAKE WAS NOT FINISHING THIS BEFORE ANYBODY ELSE GOT HURT.
THIS SHELL FROM THE TREADSHOT MURDER SCENE—THIS CAME FROM A VERY SPECIFIC KIND OF AMMUNITION: AN INFERNUS BULLET.
FROM VARAS CENTRALUS. I HAD HEARD...
THE ROUND ENTERS YOUR BODY LIKE NORMAL, BUT BURROWS INTO YOUR CIRCULATORY SYSTEM AND OVERLOADS YOUR SPARK.
IT BURNS US UP FROM THE INSIDE.
WELL, THAT SOUNDS AWFUL.
WHY WOULD YOU MAKE SOMETHING LIKE THAT?!
WE DIDN'T—THE DECEPTICONS DID. WE... MADE SURE THE INFERNUS BULLETS NEVER LEFT THAT HELLHOLE.
ME AND THE WRECKERS DESTROYED THE STOCKPILE. NOBODY'S SEEN THEM SINCE...
...BUT HERE'S THE THING.
YOU KNOW HOW THEY MADE 'EM?
THE DECEPTICONS EXPERIMENTED ON THEIR OWN—ON THREE 'CONS WITH IN-BORN FIRE ABILITIES. THEIR SCIENTISTS REVERSE-ENGINEERED THE BULLETS FROM—

THE FIRECONS.
YOU MEAN SPARKSTALKER AND HIS FRIENDS?
THE GUYS WHO TRIED TO KILL THE BOTH OF US LAST NIGHT?
STARSCREAM.
THE ONE AND ONLY, AND I BROUGHT SOME PALS. I SAW SMOKE AND, WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY—
—WHERE THERE'S SMOKE, THERE'S PRIME.
I ADMIRE THE CONNIVING ELEGANCE OF SUGGESTING YOUR NOBLE AUTOBOTS ARE INNOCENT AND THIS IS DECEPTICON-ON-DECEPTICON VIOLENCE, BUT...
THE DECEPTICONS HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE—OF COURSE THEIR CONFLICTS WILL ESCALATE.
WHY, BACK ON MY HOMEWORLD—
NO. MUCH AS IT TROUBLES ME TO SAY—I CAN'T DISAGREE WITH STARSCREAM. THIS ISN'T LOGICAL.
YOU FOUGHT A WAR THAT LASTED FOUR MILLION YEARS, AND YOU WANT TO TALK LOGIC?
LOOK—MAYBE SOME DECEPTICONS DO WANT TO GO ABOUT THEIR LIVES—BUT THERE ARE PLENTY THAT WANT TO BURN THE WORLD TO THE GROUND FOR VENGEANCE.
GUESS WHICH SIDE THE FIRECONS ARE ON!
WINDBLADE JUST ARRIVED ON OUR WORLD A FEW MONTHS AGO.
SHE BELIEVED IN CYBERTRON... BEFORE SHE SET FOOT ON IT. AS IS OUR WAY... WE CONFRONT HER WITH THE WORST OUR PLANET HAS TO OFFER.
WILL SHE STILL THINK CYBERTRON IS WORTH SAVING? AND, REALLY...

...IS IT?
WE GATHER THAT NIGHT... IN THE DECEPTICON GHETTO.
SWINDLE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THEIR HIDEOUT—I SEE THE FIRECONS ON INFRARED.
THEY'RE RUNNING HOT...
...BUT I GUESS THEY ALWAYS DO.
YOU HEAR THAT, SLUG?
AFFIRMATIVE, PRIME.
AND IT'S NOT JUST FIRECONS BURNING—
—I KNOW YOUR TEMPERS ARE, TOO, SANDSTORM.
DON'T WORRY, PRIME. WE'LL GO EASY ON 'EM.
YEAH...
...JUST GIVE THE WORD.
"CALM DOWN—"

—I'M SURE HE'S GOT OTHER THINGS ON HIS MIND, SPARKSTALKER.
I SHOT AT OPTIMUS PRIME, AND THEN SOMEBODY BURNED DOWN HIS FRIEND'S FAVORITE DIVE BAR?
YEAH, HE'S PROBABLY CONTEMPLATING SOME CLASSIC CEREBRO-CHESS MATCHES.
SHH. I THINK I HEAR—
THWUNK
—SOMETHING—!
FIRECONS— YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!
DINOBOTS— FLATTEN 'EM!
NONE OF YOU MOVE!
IT'S AN ASSASSINATION SQUAD!
DON'T GO DOWN EASY!
SLUG... DAMMIT.
THIS ESCALATED TOO FAR, TOO FAST. I SHOULD HAVE NEVER LEFT THEM ALONE.
I'M GOING IN.
OPTIMUS, WAIT—DON'T—
FROM MILLIONS OF YEARS OF EXPERIENCE, ONCE THAT BIG RED BUCKET OF BOLTS GETS SOMETHING IN HIS HEAD—
"—THERE'S NO STOPPING HIM."
SOMETIMES I FORGET SLUG HAS BEEN LEADING THE DINOBOTS FOR ONLY A FEW YEARS.
HE DOESN'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING A WARRIOR—

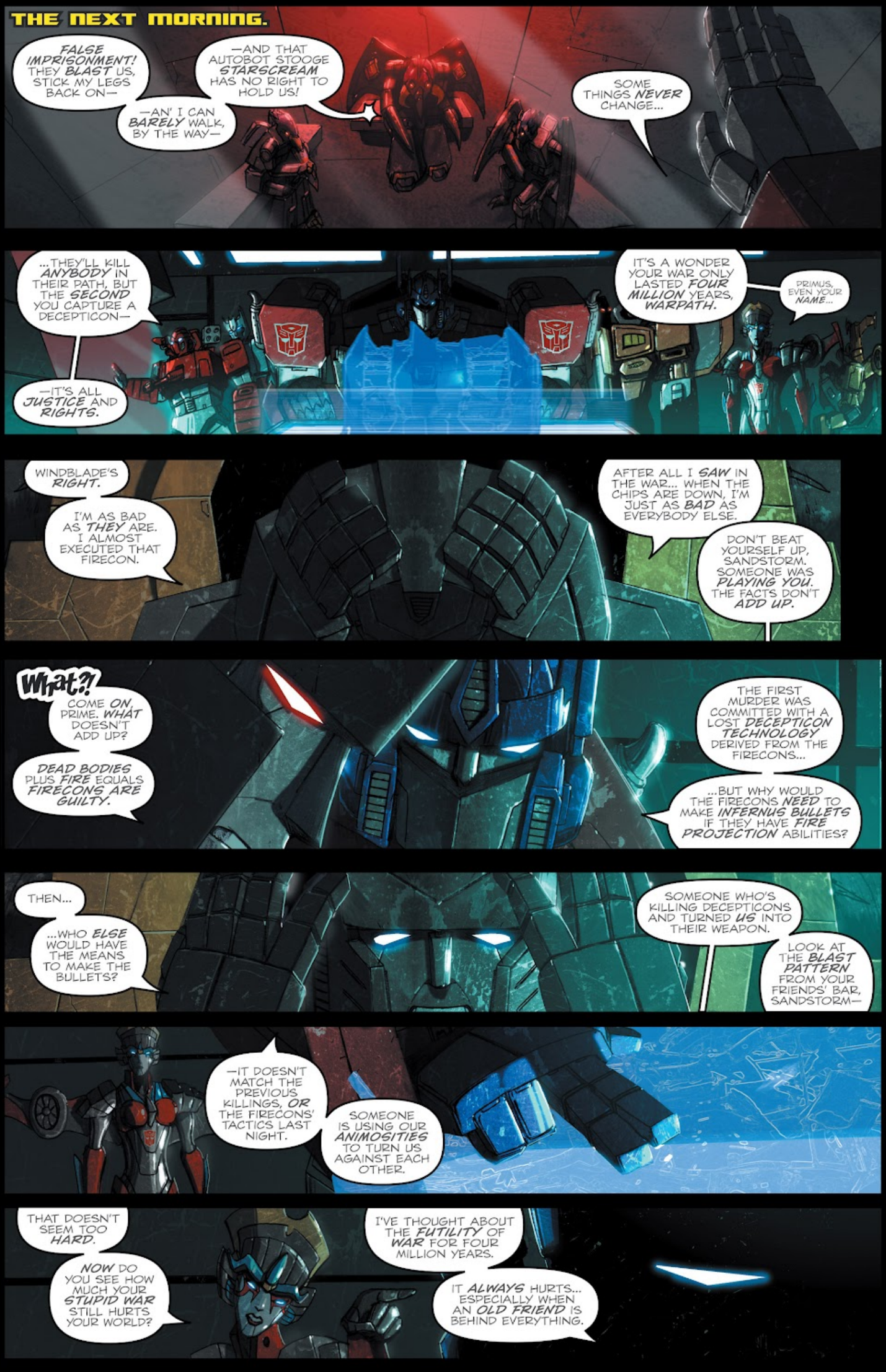
—AND BEING A LEADER.
SPARKSTALKER DIDN'T MEAN NOTHIN' WHEN HE TOOK A SHOT AT YOU!
WE JUST WANTED YOU TA LEAVE US ALONE!
BUT SANDSTORM...
...I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET SANDSTORM INTO THIS OPERATION.
YOU! FIRECON—
—YOU KILLED MY FRIENDS!
SERIOUSLY— IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK—

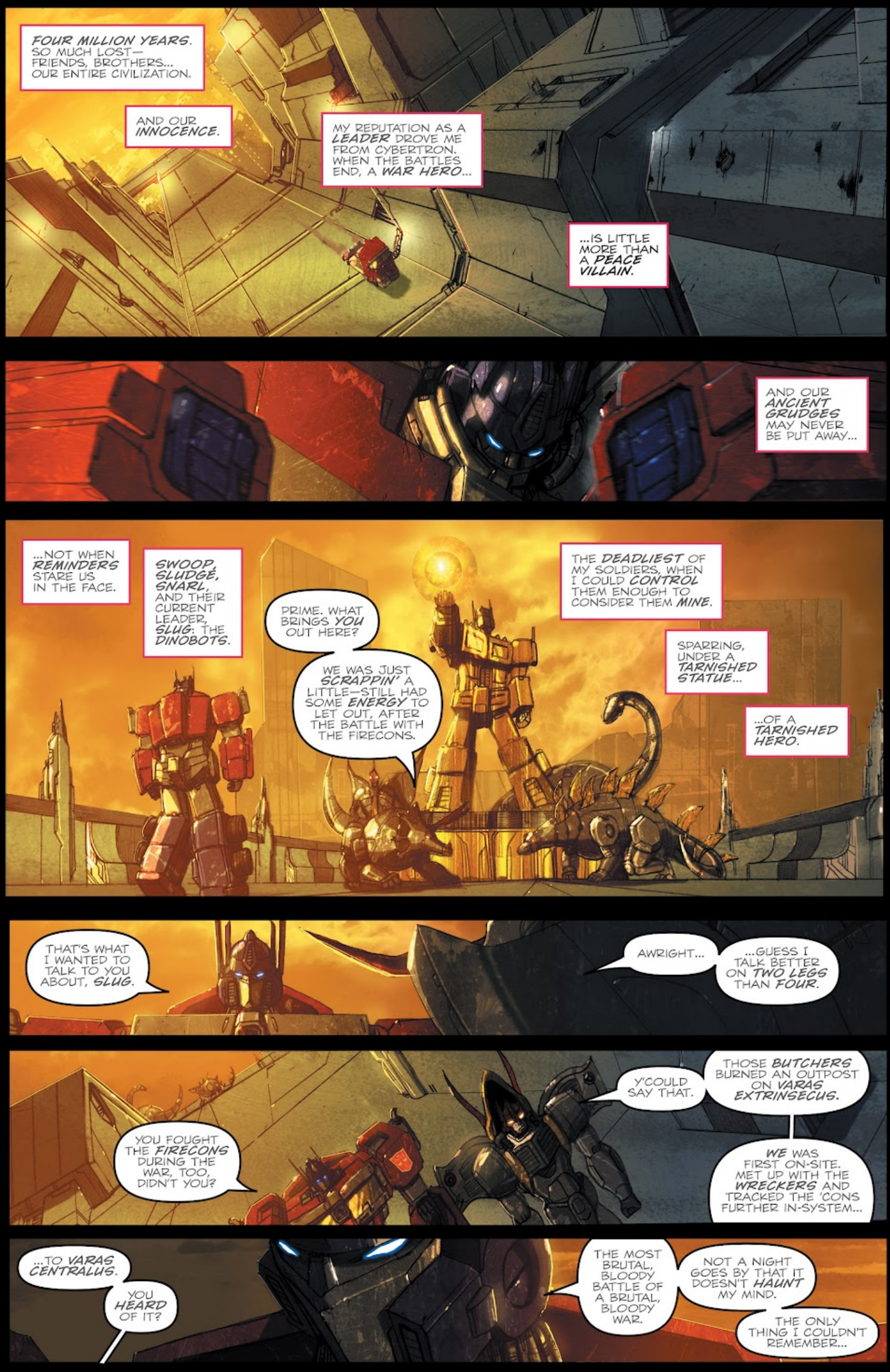
—BUT DON'T *IMAGINE* I AIN'T WILLING TO FIGHT!
FWAMP
UNNF!
OKAY, SPARKSTALKER—
—LET'S SEE WHICH ONE OF US FLIES BETTER, WITH THAT *HOLE* YOU GOT IN YOUR WING!
THESE MURDERERS ARE ALMOST PUTTIN' UP A *FIGHT*, PRIME.
LUCKY YOU BROUGHT *US* ALONG, EH?
SLUG— WHEN WE'RE *DONE* HERE—
"—YOU AND I WILL HAVE *WORDS*."
WAIT, *WAIT*—
DECEPTICON—
BLAFF
BLAFF
—WE'RE *WAY* PAST TALKING.

HANG ON! I SUR—
SHYUNK
SURRENDER ACCEPTED.
THE DINOBOTS DO WHAT THEY DO.
SNORT
GOT NUMBER TWO.
NO—
SCHLAPP
SQUAAK!
THEY END THE BATTLE, EFFICIENTLY AND RUTHLESSLY.
NICE WORK, GUYS.
NOW IT'S MY TURN...
JUST LIKE SANDSTORM AND THE WRECKERS USED TO.
AH! AH!
...LET'S MAKE IT THREE FOR THREE.
LIKE WE ALL DID, ONCE UPON A TIME. I THINK OF WINDBLADE. OF WHAT SHE MUST THINK OF US...
...AND I ACT.
STOP!
I CAN'T ALLOW THIS!
ONCE WE WERE WARRIORS.
NOW WE ARE PEOPLE, AND MUST BEHAVE AS SUCH.
AND A LEADER... A LEADER MUST KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

SANDSTORM'S MISSION CHANGED FROM A SEARCH FOR JUSTICE... TO A QUEST FOR VENGEANCE.
I'VE SEEN WHERE THAT PATH LEADS. AND I CAN'T LET HIM THROW AWAY EVERYTHING—THE PEACE WE'VE ESTABLISHED, THE CHANCE AT A REAL FUTURE FOR CYBERTRON...
...I CAN'T LET HIM THROW IT AWAY, NO MATTER HOW MUCH HE HURTS.
EASE OFF, SANDSTORM.
THE FIRECON IS DOWN. WE HAVE HIM.
IT'S OVER.
OVER?
THE KILLING JAR

OVER.
I ALMOST...
HE WAS DOWN, PRIME. DEFENSELESS.
I ALMOST—
YOU DIDN'T.
EVERYBODY—WEAPONS DOWN!
YOU—YOU—
—YOUR WAR IS OVER! THIS ISN'T HOW PEOPLE ARE SUPPOSED TO ACT!
WHAT SHE SAID.
DON'T PRETEND, STARSCREAM. IF YOU HAD HALF A CHANCE...
HALF IS MORE A CHANCE THAN THESE FIRECONS GAVE ANYBODY.
AND WE'VE BOTH GOT GOOD REASON TO NOT TRUST STARSCREAM'S BRAND OF JUSTICE, WINDBLADE.
IT'S OKAY—THINGS GOT HEATED—
—UH, NO PUN INTENDED—
—BUT THE FIRECONS ARE ALIVE.
UNH. BARELY.
THEN ONE OF YOU CALL A MEDIC.


THE NEXT MORNING.
FALSE IMPRISONMENT! THEY BLAST US, STICK MY LEGS BACK ON—
—AN' I CAN BARELY WALK, BY THE WAY—
—AND THAT AUTOBOT STOOGE STARSCREAM HAS NO RIGHT TO HOLD US!
SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE...
...THEY'LL KILL ANYBODY IN THEIR PATH, BUT THE SECOND YOU CAPTURE A DECEPTICON—
—IT'S ALL JUSTICE AND RIGHTS.
IT'S A WONDER YOUR WAR ONLY LASTED FOUR MILLION YEARS, WARPATH.
PRIMUS, EVEN YOUR NAME...
WINDBLADE'S RIGHT.
I'M AS BAD AS THEY ARE. I ALMOST EXECUTED THAT FIRECON.
AFTER ALL I SAW IN THE WAR... WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN, I'M JUST AS BAD AS EVERYBODY ELSE.
DON'T BEAT YOURSELF UP, SANDSTORM. SOMEONE WAS PLAYING YOU. THE FACTS DON'T ADD UP.
What?!
COME ON, PRIME. WHAT DOESN'T ADD UP?
DEAD BODIES PLUS FIRE EQUALS FIRECONS ARE GUILTY.
THE FIRST MURDER WAS COMMITTED WITH A LOST DECEPTICON TECHNOLOGY DERIVED FROM THE FIRECONS...
...BUT WHY WOULD THE FIRECONS NEED TO MAKE INFERNUS BULLETS IF THEY HAVE FIRE PROJECTION ABILITIES?
THEN...
...WHO ELSE WOULD HAVE THE MEANS TO MAKE THE BULLETS?
SOMEONE WHO'S KILLING DECEPTICONS AND TURNED US INTO THEIR WEAPON.
LOOK AT THE BLAST PATTERN FROM YOUR FRIENDS' BAR, SANDSTORM—
—IT DOESN'T MATCH THE PREVIOUS KILLINGS, OR THE FIRECONS' TACTICS LAST NIGHT.
SOMEONE IS USING OUR ANIMOSITIES TO TURN US AGAINST EACH OTHER.
THAT DOESN'T SEEM TOO HARD.
NOW DO YOU SEE HOW MUCH YOUR STUPID WAR STILL HURTS YOUR WORLD?
I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT THE FUTILITY OF WAR FOR FOUR MILLION YEARS.
IT ALWAYS HURTS... ESPECIALLY WHEN AN OLD FRIEND IS BEHIND EVERYTHING.

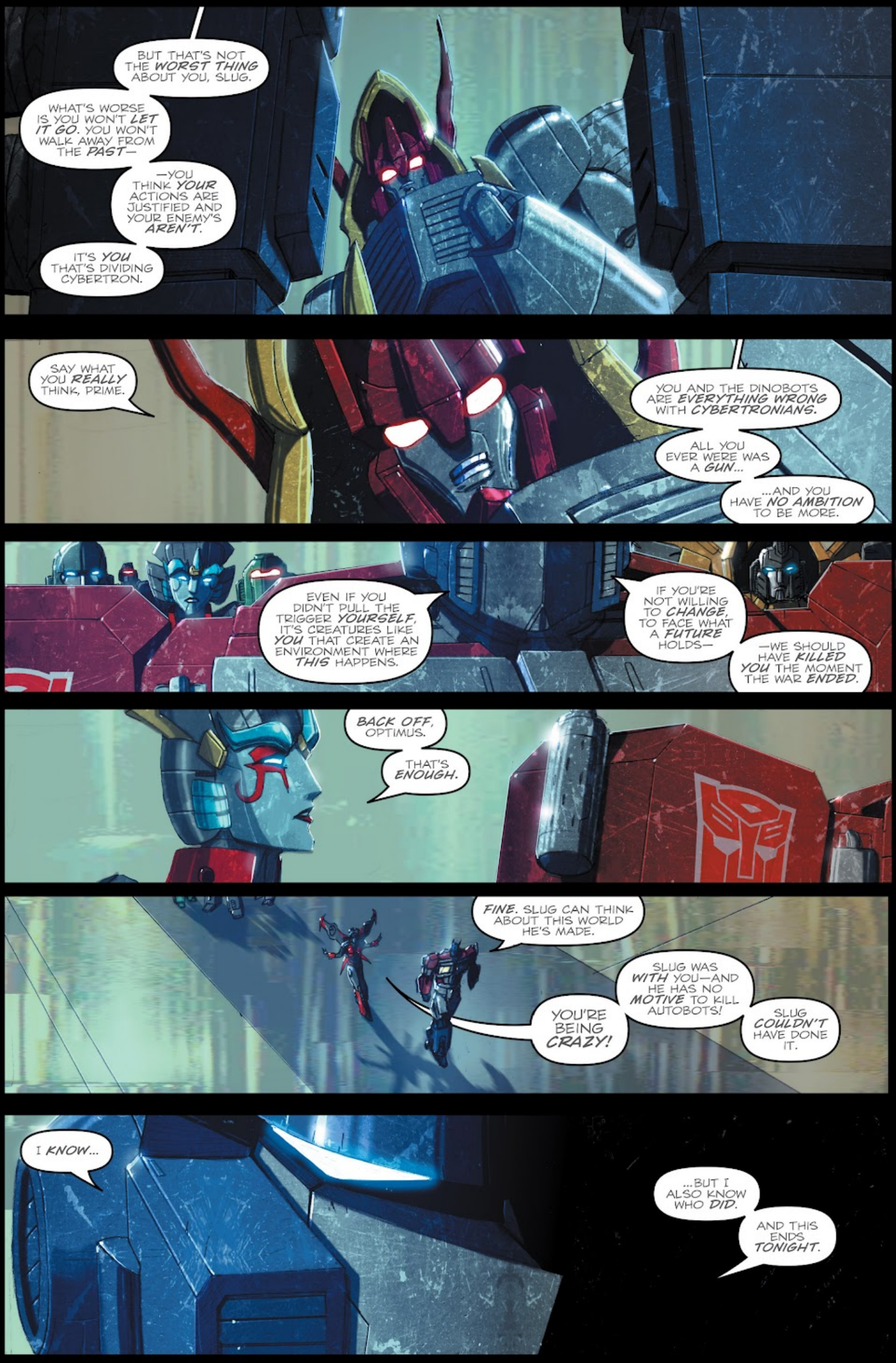

FOUR MILLION YEARS. SO MUCH LOST— FRIENDS, BROTHERS... OUR ENTIRE CIVILIZATION.
AND OUR INNOCENCE.
MY REPUTATION AS A LEADER DROVE ME FROM CYBERTRON. WHEN THE BATTLES END, A WAR HERO...
...IS LITTLE MORE THAN A PEACE VILLAIN.
AND OUR ANCIENT GRUDGES MAY NEVER BE PUT AWAY...
...NOT WHEN REMINDERS STARE US IN THE FACE.
SWOOP, SLUDGE, SNARL, AND THEIR CURRENT LEADER, SLUG: THE DINOBOTS.
PRIME. WHAT BRINGS YOU OUT HERE?
WE WAS JUST SCRAPPIN' A LITTLE—STILL HAD SOME ENERGY TO LET OUT, AFTER THE BATTLE WITH THE FIRECONS.
THE DEADLIEST OF MY SOLDIERS, WHEN I COULD CONTROL THEM ENOUGH TO CONSIDER THEM MINE.
SPARRING, UNDER A TARNISHED STATUE...
...OF A TARNISHED HERO.
THAT'S WHAT I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT, SLUG.
AWRIGHT...
...GUESS I TALK BETTER ON TWO LEGS THAN FOUR.
YOU FOUGHT THE FIRECONS DURING THE WAR, TOO, DIDN'T YOU?
Y'COULD SAY THAT.
THOSE BUTCHERS BURNED AN OUTPOST ON VARAS EXTRINSECUS.
WE WAS FIRST ON-SITE. MET UP WITH THE WRECKERS AND TRACKED THE 'CONS FURTHER IN-SYSTEM...
...TO VARAS CENTRALUS.
YOU HEARD OF IT?
THE MOST BRUTAL, BLOODY BATTLE OF A BRUTAL, BLOODY WAR.
NOT A NIGHT GOES BY THAT IT DOESN'T HAUNT MY MIND.
THE ONLY THING I COULDN'T REMEMBER...

...WAS IF YOU WERE THERE.
I GET IT, SLUG.
YOU CAN BREATHE FIRE.
YOU HAD ACCESS TO THE INFERNUS BULLETS.
YOU AND THE DINOBOTS SAW THE WORST THE DECEPTICONS HAD TO OFFER.
YOU'RE LIVING HERE ON A CYBERTRON CONTROLLED BY STARSCREAM, AND I GET IT.
I UNDERSTAND WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU SNAP.
BUT I STILL HAVE TO STOP YOU.
PRIME... I HATE THE DECEPTICONS.
I HATE STARSCREAM.
I HATE THAT THAT SOCIOPATH IS IN CHARGE O' MY PLANET.
I HATE A LOT O' THINGS...
...BUT UNTIL RIGHT NOW— I NEVER HATED YOU.
CHAMK
KRAK
GRUNFF!
FWOOSH

WHAT DID STARSCREAM SAY?
"WHERE THERE'S SMOKE, THERE'S PRIME"?
AW.
THIS CAN'T BE GOOD.
GIVE UP!
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOIN', PRIME!
Y'DON'T WANT TO START THIS!
KRAK
KLUD
HE'S RIGHT, BOSS—
—THE ONLY WAY DINOBOTS TAKE THINGS... IS ALL THE WAY.
SO UNLESS YOU'RE WILLING TO FOLLOW THIS ROAD, PRIME...
STAND DOWN.
DOWN'S THE ONLY PLACE YOU'LL BE STANDING, PRIME.
FZZT
UH. THAT LINE DIDN'T REALLY MAKE ANY SENSE, SLUG.
PRIME—WHAT IN THE NAME OF THE AFTERSPARK DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?!
I DON'T CARE WHO YOU WERE IN THE WAR—THIS IS MY WORLD NOW, AND IT DOESN'T NEED A SECOND VIGILANTE!
I KNOW WHO IS BEHIND THIS, STARSCREAM.
YOU BIG RED OAF.
YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING.
THERE'S BEEN ANOTHER MURDER—BUT THIS ONE ISN'T IN THE GHETTO...
...AND IT'S NOT DECEPTICONS THAT GOT KILLED.

SLUG AND I SHEATHE OUR ANGER AND FOLLOW STARSCREAM'S SIGNAL INSIDE METROPLEX. PERHAPS I WAS WRONG TO DO WHAT I DID...
...I SUPPOSE ONLY TIME WILL TELL.
THERE WERE DOZENS OF NEUTRALS AND OTHER AUTOBOTS IN THE COURTYARD. NONE OF THEM WERE HIT.
AND NOBODY GOT A GOOD LOOK, BARRICADE?
WHOEVER DID THIS USED E.M.P.S AND SONICS TO BLIND EVERYBODY.
THE WITNESSES COULDN'T EVEN TELL HOW MANY ATTACKERS THERE WERE.
SKRAM, LANDER, DIVER, AND FIREBALL.
ALL BIG NAMES, I'M SURE.
STARSCREAM— IT'S ONE THING IF DECEPTICONS GET OFFED, BUT THIS...
ALL LIFE IS IMPORTANT, SLUG.
YOU'VE BEEN GONE TOO LONG.
THE CYBERTRONIAN PEOPLE MAY NOT HAVE FOND MEMORIES OF THE WAR—
—BUT THEY WON'T STAND FOR DEAD AUTOBOTS.
GET A CREW, BARRICADE.
SIR—?
RAZE THE DECEPTICON GHETTO.
I'VE BEEN LETTING THINGS GET WORSE—MAYBE KNOCKING DOWN SOME BUILDINGS WILL LOOSEN SOME VOCAL PROCESSORS.
NO WAY, STARSCREAM.
I'M A COP. I SIDED WITH A UNITED CYBERTRON BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN IT. BUT THERE'S A REASON I STILL WEAR THE DECEPTICON SIGIL—
—AND I'M SICK OF PEOPLE SAYING I'VE SOLD OUT OR I'M JUST AN— AN AUTOBOT.
I DO WHAT I DO IN THE NAME OF EQUALITY, AND THAT'S ALWAYS BEEN THE DECEPTICON CAUSE.
I'M NOT FOLLOWING YOUR ORDER. AND I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO ME.

BARRICADE... NO ONE WILL HARM YOU.
YOU ARE AN HONOR TO YOUR CAUSE.
AND DO NOT LOSE SIGHT— YOUR STRUGGLE IS EVERYONE'S STRUGGLE.
I... UH...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY TO THAT, PRIME.
ALL OF US MUST CONCENTRATE ON FINDING THE REAL KILLER— OR KILLERS.
THIS IS THE GUY YOU FOLLOWED FOR HOW MANY MILLIONS OF YEARS?
HOW DOES SOMEONE WITH NO UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICS—
STARSCREAM. WE AIN'T FRIENDS.
DON'T ACT LIKE WE ARE.
THIS IS HOW THE ATTACKERS GOT OUT. AN ACCESS DUCT.
LEADS TO A DISUSED DRY-DOCK FOUR LEVELS UP— RIGHT BELOW THAT PARK WITH YOUR STATUE, PRIME. YOU KNOW THE ONE?
OH, HE KNOWS IT, ALRIGHT.
THE TUNNEL LOOKS BIG— BIG ENOUGH TO FIT ME, EVEN.
SURE, BUT THE KILLERS WERE CLEAR BY THE TIME I GOT TO THE DRY DOCK—45 SECONDS AFTER THE E.M.P. TRIGGERED METROPLEX'S ALARMS.
THAT'S FOUR LEVELS NEARLY VERTICAL. IF YOU WEREN'T FLYING—
WHOEVER IT WAS WASN'T FLYING—NOT IN THAT TUNNEL.
THE TURBULENCE IN THERE IS CRAZY.
HOW WOULD YOU—
WHAT? I LIKE EXPLORING.
THEN IF YOU SOMEHOW MADE IT UP THERE, YOU'D HAVE TO BE DRIVING REAL FAST TO GET CLEAR.
OR CRAWLING FAST, AFTER YOUR WINGED PARTNER FLEW YOU UP.
HEY.
DON'T LOOK AT ME, PRIME—YOUR ACCUSATION DON'T MAKE SENSE IF AUTOBOTS ARE DYING.
I KNOW WHAT YOU DID ON VARAS CENTRALUS, SLUG!
I SAID I DIDN'T REMEMBER, BUT I DO—
—AND YOUR HANDS WERE NO CLEANER THAN THE FIRECONS'!
SHUV


BUT THAT'S NOT THE WORST THING ABOUT YOU, SLUG.
WHAT'S WORSE IS YOU WON'T LET IT GO. YOU WON'T WALK AWAY FROM THE PAST—
—YOU THINK YOUR ACTIONS ARE JUSTIFIED AND YOUR ENEMY'S AREN'T.
IT'S YOU THAT'S DIVIDING CYBERTRON.
SAY WHAT YOU REALLY THINK, PRIME.
YOU AND THE DINOBOTS ARE EVERYTHING WRONG WITH CYBERTRONIANS.
ALL YOU EVER WERE WAS A GUN...
...AND YOU HAVE NO AMBITION TO BE MORE.
EVEN IF YOU DIDN'T PULL THE TRIGGER YOURSELF, IT'S CREATURES LIKE YOU THAT CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THIS HAPPENS.
IF YOU'RE NOT WILLING TO CHANGE, TO FACE WHAT A FUTURE HOLDS—
—WE SHOULD HAVE KILLED YOU THE MOMENT THE WAR ENDED.
BACK OFF, OPTIMUS.
THAT'S ENOUGH.
FINE. SLUG CAN THINK ABOUT THIS WORLD HE'S MADE.
SLUG WAS WITH YOU—AND HE HAS NO MOTIVE TO KILL AUTOBOTS!
YOU'RE BEING CRAZY!
SLUG COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT.
I KNOW...
...BUT I ALSO KNOW WHO DID.
AND THIS ENDS TONIGHT.

FOREVER IS A LONG TIME COMING
OPTIMUS PRIME SAID YOU SHOULDA BEEN KILLED AFTER THE WAR, SLUG?
WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE SAME OPTIMUS PRIME, RIGHT?
I SURE AM.
THE SAME ONE I'M GONNA MURDER.

HEY, I DON'T LIKE ALL THESE 'CONS *RUNNING FREE* ANY MORE THAN YOU DO, BUT PRIME'S NOT A *BAD* GUY.
HE'S THE ULTIMATE *GOOD* GUY, IN FACT.
SURE, WE GOT OUR *DISAGREEMENTS*, BUT LET'S SEE IF WE CAN *WORK THINGS OUT*.
GET YOUR HAND *OFF* ME, *SWOOP*.
—SLUDGE—
SNARL—
—YOU TWO WANNA *PLAY NICE* LIKE SWOOP, OR YOU WANT TO MAKE PRIME *ANSWER* FOR WHAT HE *SAID*?!
YOU'RE THE *BOSS*, SLUG.
HEY, C'MON!
I DIDN'T SAY I WASN'T *WITH* YOU!
I'M STILL A—
WAIT, WHAT'S THAT—
—NOISE—?
KHA
KLOOSH
AND *THAT* WAS THE *END* OF THE *DINOBOTS*.

OF COURSE, IT WASN'T *REALLY*.
I HAD A *PLAN*—ONE THAT I COULDN'T LET *SLUG* OR THE *OTHERS* IN ON.
THE DINOBOTS' *PARK* IS LOCATED ABOVE THE OLD *DRY-DOCK*.
BARRICADE KNEW THE MECHANISM THAT WOULD DROP THE *FLOOR* OUT FROM UNDER THEM, WHEN THE KILLER STRUCK.
SWOOP WOULD CHANGE MODES AND *FLY* WITH NO PROBLEM.
THE OTHERS WOULD *PROBABLY* BE FINE. BUT I CALLED IN SOME *HELP*, JUST IN CASE.
STARSCREAM AND *WINDBLADE*—CAPABLE OF *SNARING* THREE DINOBOTS.
AND OUTSIDE OF THE *FIRESTORM*... WOULD BE THE *KILLER*.
LURED INTO PUBLIC BY MY *DECLARATION* OF THE DINOBOTS' *WAR CRIMES*.
CAUGHT, IF NOT *RED*-HANDED...
...AT LEAST *ORANGE*.
PUT DOWN THE *DETONATOR*, AND PUT YOUR *HANDS* IN THE AIR...

...YOU'RE UNDER ARREST, SANDSTORM.
YOU'RE GUILTY OF MURDERING FOURTEEN CYBERTRONIANS, AND ATTEMPTING TO KILL SEVEN MORE.
SEVEN. REALLY, PRIME?
YOU REALLY CARE ENOUGH TO COUNT THE FIRECONS?
IF THEIR LIVES MEAN SO MUCH TO YOU—

CHAGG
—MAYBE YOU ALL DESERVE THE SAME!

UNNH!
AN INFERNUS BULLET.
A TERRIBLE WAY TO DIE.
TERRIBLE ENOUGH TO MAKE ME WONDER...
...IS SANDSTORM REALLY SO FAR GONE?
COULD HE LIVE WITH HIMSELF AFTER MURDERING A FRIEND?
PRIME...
WHATEVER THE CASE...
UNNH...
...NNH.
...I WILL NOT LET HIM LEARN THE CAPACITY OF HIS REGRET.
SHRIK
SANDSTORM...
PRIME.
I'M—I'M SO SORRY.
I NEVER—I DIDN'T REALLY MEAN—
...YOU...
...YOU ARRR—
RAAAGH!
YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!
SLAM
WUUUHH!

I KNOW, PRIME.
I JUST... I'VE SEEN TOO MUCH.
TOO MUCH TO LET GO UNPUNISHED.
"WHEN I WAS A WRECKER, I SAW... NOT JUST THE ENEMY, BUT THE THINGS WE DID.
"WE KILLED UNARMED PRISONERS, PRIME—AND AS BAD AS THINGS GOT—
"—WE WERE NEVER THE WORST.
"THE INHABITANTS OF SOME BACKWOODS PLANET CALLED TRAUJOR HELPED US AFTER A RUN-IN WITH A DECEPTICON FLAGSHIP.
"TREADSHOT AND HIS CREW WERE SENT TO MAKE SURE THAT NEVER HAPPENED AGAIN.
"WHEN WE RAN INTO HEAVY BARREL'S CREW SYPHONING PSEUDO-ENERGON FROM A TINY MECHANOID WORLD...
"...THEY LAUGHED AT STARVING NATIVES. LAUGHED!
"GUTCRUNCHER AND STRATOTRONIC SPREE-KILLED CYBERTRONIAN REFUGEES UNDER OUR PROTECTION—
"—JUST TO PROVE NO ONE WAS SAFE.
"WE SET DOWN ON A DESERT WORLD WEEKS AFTER SKIDMARK AND THE OTHERS AT GUTCRUNCHER'S BAR HAD CASUALLY CRUSHED SOME NAMELESS CIVILIZATION.
"THEY NEVER EVEN REACHED THE STARS, PRIME!
"THAT ALWAYS STUCK WITH ME, SO I PRETENDED TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH THE KILLERS.
"I SET UP A PLASMA INCENDIARY. YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT THE BLAST PATTERN—IT WAS MUCH TOO ORGANIZED FOR THE FIRECONS.
"THE FIRECONS, BREATHING FLAMES SO HOT THE AIR BURNED ON VARAS CENTRALUS.
"THOUSANDS OF AUTOBOTS DIED THAT DAY...
"...THOUGH NOT THE BRUTAL FIST OF THE AUTOBOT WAY, THE DINOBOTS.
"WE WRECKERS WEREN'T SCARED OF THEM... WE WERE HORRIFIED.
"BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL I WENT BEHIND ENEMY LINES, LEARNING THE DECEPTICONS' SECRETS... THAT I REALLY LEARNED OURS.
"SKRAM AND FIREBALL AND THE OTHERS, DESTROYING PLANETS IN RETALIATION FOR AIDING THE DECEPTICONS.
"GETTING OUT OF THE COURTYARD WHERE I KILLED THEM WAS EASY—A TRIPLE CHANGER LIKE ME CAN DRIVE AND FLY.
"THE HARD THING WAS THE LINGERING QUESTION..."

...HAD THEY ACTED ALONE?
DID AUTOBOT HIGH COMMAND SEND THEM—
—DID YOU LEARN ABOUT THEM, PRIME—
—AND JUST NEVER TELL US?
IF YOU DID—I UNDERSTAND. IT'S TOO MUCH TO KNOW!
HOW CAN I LIVE WITH MYSELF NOW?!
HOW DO YOU?
KRUNK
SCRAOGHK
I TRY TO STAY GROUNDED.
SANDSTORM WENT TO JAIL.

BUT I STILL HAD ANOTHER REASON TO BE ON CYBERTRON.
A PERSONAL ONE, THAT DREW ME TO THE SITE OF THE FIRST OF SANDSTORM'S MURDERS.
I HEARD YOU CAME BACK HERE, OPTIMUS...
...SANDSTORM WON'T BE GOING ANYWERE, NOT IF STARSCREAM HAS HIS WAY.
THAT... IS FOR THE BEST.
WHAT ARE YOU HOLDING?
IT HAD A FEW NAMES, BUT I ALWAYS CALLED IT...
...THE MATRIX OF LEADERSHIP.
I HEARD IT BROKE.
LIKE CYBERTRON.
OH-KAY.
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
THIS BUILDING WAS CONSTRUCTED ABOVE ANCIENT RUINS.
ON THIS DAY, IN THIS PLACE MANY, MANY YEARS AGO, I RECEIVED THE MATRIX.
THIS IS THE ANNIVERSARY OF ME BECOMING PRIME.
AN ANCIENT POSITION, ONE OF OPPRESSION AND TYRANNY.
TINK
THIS IS WHERE MY FUTURE BEGAN, BUILT ON PAST CRIMES—THE KIND CYBERTRON CAN NEVER ESCAPE.
DON'T GIVE UP, OPTIMUS. YOU SAVED THE DINOBOTS—
AFTER I SAID THEY SHOULD DIE.
YOU NEEDED TO LIE BIG TO DRAW SANDSTORM OUT.
YOU DON'T KNOW ME VERY WELL. I NEVER LIE.
AT LEAST SANDSTORM SAW CYBERTRON UNITED, EVEN IF IT WAS UNITED IN ATROCITY.
SLUG'S REFUSAL TO CHANGE IS THE GREATER THREAT TO OUR FUTURE.
THEN WHY COME HERE? WHAT DID YOU HOPE TO FIND?
THE MEMORY OF BELIEVING IN TOMORROW, WINDBLADE.
NO MATTER WHAT I FEEL...

...CYBERTRON NEEDS ME TO HOLD ON TO THAT.

AFTERWORD

This comic started out in a different form.

Well, sort of.

Here's the story: I write one of the two ongoing Transformers comics, the one called *Transformers*—which, along with the always-excellent *Transformers: More Than Meets the Eye* by writer James Roberts and artist Alex Milne, helps tell the story of the world's favorite Robots in Disguise. All credit to James and Alex, the comics we do are well-received by Transformers and comics fans alike.

So when the fine folks at Madefire—the premiere app for what they call "motion books"—came to IDW and asked if we'd be up for doing a comic designed for their platform, we jumped at the chance.

I actually spent the early 2000s doing webcomics with animated panel transitions. There were a handful of us (including frequent Transformers comics artist Brendan Cahill and my friend Daniel Merlin Goodbrey) using Flash as an interface for comics—not doing cartoon animation, but using the program to create new page layouts and storytelling options.

I've been critical of some "motion comics" that came later—that term got applied to taking the art from comics and creating limited-animation cartoons. Some have been good, some have been terrible; but for me, they're not really comics—they're animation using comics as source material. Nothing inherently wrong with that, but I was excited that's not what Madefire does.

Madefire comics have music and sound effects and cool transitions—but the reader controls the experience, and reads the words and sees how they interact with the images… it's still a reading experience, not a watching experience.

So now all we needed was an idea. Well, actually, back when I'd done my outline for the ongoing *Transformers* comic, I had a couple issues that were set on Cybertron (most of the action had moved to Earth). One of those came from my collaborator on that series, artist Andrew Griffith, who suggested using the character Sandstorm.

When Andrew said that, my head went to the character's appearance in *Last Stand of the Wreckers*, the acclaimed limited series by Nick Roche and James Roberts. Sandstorm there gave me the basic idea of this story—a former Wrecker who's seen the worst the universe has to offer and decides to do something about it. Sorry you didn't get to draw it, Andrew! I promise we'll see more Sandstorm!

So with the bare bones of the story in place, I called up Livio Ramondelli—another of my favorite artistic collaborators. Livio was into the premise, and after talking to Madefire's Ben Abernathy and our editor Carlos Guzman, we pulled the story together.

I wrote the story plot-first—just a description of the action divided into pages (knowing we'd do this print collection) which Livio broke into panels. Livio drew the comic as traditional pages—he draws everything on art board (paper) which he scans into his computer and adds colors and special effects. In this case, he'd sometimes keep the effects and backgrounds on separate Photoshop layers so the Madefire team could manipulate them—using the pages as raw material for a unique reading experience. I came back afterward and wrote the dialogue. Tom Long lettered it, and put all the word balloons and sound effects on another layer, and we sent it off to Madefire.

Basically—Livio and I (plus Tom and Carlos) created the comic in the format you hold in your hands, but made sure there was space for the team at Madefire to do their thing.

All that said—this wound up being a hard comic for me to write.

I mean, not because of Livio, of course, who nailed every page—some of which were crazy-hard to bring to life. And not because of Ben or any of the team at Madefire, who were awesome. Not Hasbro—as always, they were fantastic, and our contacts there, Michael Kelly and Heather Hopkins, were always around to help. And not IDW, where everybody from digital guru Jeff Webber to CEO Ted Adams was incredibly supportive.

The thing was, this was just a dark, dark story. Some of my *Transformers* stories have gotten pretty bleak, and certainly James Roberts is no stranger to emotionally devastating stories. So, like, we go there in the Transformers comics.

But for me, entering the headspace of war crimes, retribution, grudges that never die, and the moral gray that goes with all of that… it's not a specific emotional beat, but the unrelenting mood that got under my skin.

There's no way *out* for anybody in this story—Windblade is the only character who isn't fully entrenched in this war that never really ends. The story leaves the reader with a lot of questions—what happens to Sandstorm? He didn't kill any innocent Cybertronians, so what do you do with him now? How much, if anything, did Autobot High Command know about what went on in the war?

It was a difficult story to immerse oneself in. At least, I found it difficult—I don't know if Livio had the same experience; he had to live with all this longer than me, so I hope it didn't mess with him much.

But for the characters, the story *really* doesn't end. *Transformers #39* starts the *Combiner Wars* event, which crosses over between *Transformers* and our new *Transformers: Windblade* series, and picks up right where this ends. Livio and I are back on the Transformers issues, and Mairghread Scott and Sarah Stone are doing *Windblade*. Optimus Prime and Windblade come face-to-face with Starscream's grandest scheme yet… and more war seems to be on the horizon.

Hope you join us there—and thank you for picking this one up. Thanks to everybody mentioned above, and also to the whole Madefire team that put this together for the screen, including: George Englund Jr., Cody Garcia, Yuponce, Wendell, Jerry Yamashita, Chris Faamausili, Colton Becker, and Ben Abernathy.

And special thanks to IDW Managing Editor David Hedgecock—after finishing this, he offered me the chance to write *Angry Birds Transformers*. And, let me tell you, the opportunity to do something funny and light was something I launched myself into with a slingshot—especially when Livio joined me and Marcelo Ferreira for a few pages.

So at least Livio and I made it out of this—even if Optimus, Windblade, Slug, and Sandstorm never will.

John

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